

## **Diphtheria**

Agent: Toxin secreted by strains of the bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*

Mode of Transmission: Person-to-person transmission via respiratory droplets. Rarely, transmission may occur from contact with skin lesions or articles soiled with discharges from the lesions of infected persons.

Signs/Symptoms: Sore throat, anorexia, nasal discharge, and formation of a bluish-white, grayish-green, or black adherent membrane in the throat. More severe cases can include swelling of the neck and airway passages.

Prevention: Diphtheria vaccine is available as part of the diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis (DTaP) vaccine for children and the combination tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for adolescents and adults. One dose of Tdap should be given at 11 to 12 years of age with booster doses of tetanus/diphtheria (Td) every ten years thereafter.

Other Important Information: The overall case-fatality rate for diphtheria is 5%-10%, with higher death rates in young children and those over 40 years of age.

No cases of diphtheria have been reported in Virginia since 1989. Nationally, two cases have been reported in the last decade. The most recent case of diphtheria was reported in 2014 and the preceding case occurred in 2012. Diphtheria is still endemic in certain areas of the world, with 4,778 cases being reported to the World Health Organization in 2015.